

RETURN

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Abstract

Return is an experimental documentary framing a search for home amidst displacement. Through personal travel footage, family interviews, archival photography and collected clips from Palestine/Israel, the work interrogates how movement frames the idea of home. Through unearthing the cycles of displacement, the film intends to bring up the question of “What remains outside the frame?” when we conceive of home. The frame itself, as in Derrida’s *parergon*, the accessory aspect of a work, always points to something missing in the work itself and by doing so comments and editorializes. The frame, although seemingly peripheral, is central in pointing out what is lacking in a work, or in a narrative. *Return* is an exploration of margins and frames in an attempt to get to a broader understanding of the boundaries of “home”.

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Introduction

Frame

So carry your homeland wherever you go, and be

A narcissist if need be

The outside world is exile,

exile is the world inside.

And what are you between the two?

- Mahmoud Darwish ¹

Teshuvah is a Hebrew word meaning both *return* and *answer* or *response*. Sadly, in its particularist reading in contemporary Jewish history, the narrative of return to homeland has become the engine of a destructive cycle of displacement and has led to the erasure of lives and homes in Palestine. The traumas of Jewish diaspora and displacement, culminating in the Holocaust and the devastation of European Jewry, gave rise to the violence of nationalistic ambition in the form of political Zionism. The liturgical and traditional yearning in Jewish prayer for Zion as a symbol of hope and relief for the historically victimized Jews, when concretely pursued, left a great hopelessness in its wake for the non-Jewish inhabitants of the land.

I return to the story of home and homeland in search of a new answer to the question of where to find hope and relief. As a Jewish Canadian, with grandparents who lived through the

¹ Mahmoud Darwish, "Edward Said: A Contrapuntal Reading," trans. Mona Anis, *Cultural Critique* 67 (Fall 2007).

Holocaust, I have inherited multiple framings of home. Brought up to feel at home in Canada and taught that, in the case of disaster, Israel stood waiting with doors open, I remained safe from being left homeless and stateless. In this work I examine these framings of home for Jews in Canada and the effect of Israel and Zionism on the Jewish diaspora. Aware of the limited lens of my own social positioning, I try to look beyond the edges of my own worldview and education to see what has been left out.

I aim to situate myself among the critical voices of the Jewish community who have addressed the problematic elements and underpinnings of the current State of Israel from a sense of personal engagement. This thesis work is an attempt to situate and clarify for myself the personal in the political and the political within the personal. The trauma of displacement and loss of family during the Holocaust is something I experience personally and has implications for how the Jewish community relates to that trauma. The specter of genocide served as rhetorical fodder for David Ben Gurion and the founders of the State of Israel who rallied support for the Zionist cause by warning about a possibility of a second Holocaust (which was not ever a risk in 1948). To this day reaction to the Holocaust has prompted two distinct responses -- either in closing ranks and saying, "Never again, to us" or in widening the lessons of loss to saying, "Never again, to anyone". I believe that an emphasis on the personal and humanity of the individual provides a better chance of a universal reading of "Never again".

My personal experience growing up in a Zionist educational system is in many ways representative of larger political movements and conversations. My experiences of travel, migration and questioning are not unique. I recognize them as part of a larger trend of disaffiliating critical Jews interrogating and speaking out against aspects of what Zionism stands for. This exploration and dissatisfaction are indeed common amongst my more committed and thoughtful friends and peers.

The family and state narratives that have shaped my perspectives and subsequent responses still strongly hold sway in the mainstream Jewish community in Toronto, which I consider myself to be a part of, albeit at times reluctantly, and often critically. I have used filmmaking and reference to particular personal connections to disrupt the simplified narratives of the destruction of the Holocaust resulting in an inevitable redemptive ending in political Zionism. Through examining the frame of my own stories that I am deeply familiar with, I might be able to better expand outwards to see the larger cultural, political and ideological influences that frame my own life. Because dealing with Israel is a personal issue, I am also moved and challenged by observing my own community's frequent inability to see beyond a singular story of the State of Israel. Support of Israel is assumed throughout the Jewish community in which I live and I have become accustomed to hearing the cracks in the image of the state often responded to through propagandistic responses that rather than looking and wrestling with the issues, capitulate to a standard narrative of Israeli exceptionalism, whether it be the occupation, the horrific toll in Gaza, fascist turns of the Israeli government or unabashed racism.

The Palestinian and Israeli narratives are separate and unique, yet there is obvious influence that each narrative exerts on the other. Both make claims to the same land. Both contain elements of displacement and longing to return home. And yet, only one has the power that comes with military and political control to push aside the other. Legislative attempts to make talking about the Nakba (literally, "catastrophe", the national tragedy that befell Palestinians in 1947 and 1948) illegal and the violent dispersal of Nakba Day ceremonies are demonstrative of the way the Israeli narrative can push aside a Palestinian narrative that appears threatening.

My film is meant to raise questions from personal experience in and fluency with a Jewish narrative and to use that understanding to bring awareness of the way the conflict is framed. As opposed to making political claims from a broad theoretical framework, the activist stance of my

film work springs from specific personal engagement with individuals over time and through private disappointment. While questions of human rights and oppression are inherently public and political and indeed are the responsibility of the public to comment upon, my comments here lean closely toward reflections around family reticence to reflect and community support for turning aside from the problems of Israel. I am trying to uncover the role of my Jewish community, specifically in the diaspora, in dealing with these issues from a distance, where it is perhaps easier for my community to overlay its own frame and obfuscate Palestinian frames and historic connection to the land.

Process

The theoretical underpinning of my work is tied to Alfred North Whitehead's framework of Process Philosophy. Like Whitehead, I too see connection as the central defining feature of reality, and my work comes out of such an understanding of the world. My work in process filmmaking explores what Whitehead terms "occasions" and this film, in its unfolding attempts to plot the relationships I encounter, is ultimately a record of my own experiences in relation to one another over time.

Henri Bergson emphasizes the importance of experiencing the duration of time, and the central feature of experimental intuition for understanding. What is grasped through intuition cannot be conceptualized, and this worldview that I have inherited is also present in my own filmmaking, whether it be my own collecting of footage over time, or my attempts at experimenting with juxtaposing image and audio, I choose to use the medium of film as a means to intuitively re-examine the connections that form the fabric of my world.

The making of this film included collecting footage, expanding ideas and narrowing down selections. I travelled to Palestine/Israel in the summer of 2014 and shot 16mm footage while travelling to places where I used to live, interviews (largely informational) with activists and piecemeal documentation of political issues that were looming while I was present, including Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem, imprisonment of African refugees and responses to the kidnapping of three Israeli teens that subsequently led up to a war in Gaza.

I had the themes of “home”, “diaspora” and “displacement” as guiding principles in choosing what to document, rather than a particular story. I was led on by my own intuitions, especially while editing, and the narrative I put forward is perhaps best described as a loose account of my own responses to the above listed themes, in the political milieu of contemporary Zionism in Israel and Canada. Documenting my own responses, which have never been linear, it felt appropriate to work experimentally, to capture impressions, rather than align to a more rigid narrative format. Admittedly, this boils down to a personal preference in working style.

The eventual decision to have separate chapters for these various impressions is meant to evoke the sense of gathered imprints, and works in the model of multi-vocal essay films of bh Yael, Mike Hoolboom and others discussed in the “Inspiration” section below.

After a process of winnowing down large swaths of footage, from the 2014 trip, in addition to a trip in the winter of 2013 and footage from my time living overseas, I have focused on four elements that I consider essential and especially engaging: 1) Visiting homes where I have lived in in Israel/Palestine 2) My grandmother’s story of leaving Germany 3) The Jewish National Fund’s Canada Park and its erasure of the memory of Palestinian villages and 4) Early photography in Palestine. I conceive of these four sections as addressing 1) the personal 2) the familial 3) the politics of community and 4) the politics of the frame.

After this process of collecting and editing I am left with an expanding body of work

engaging the topic of discovering and re-interpreting “home” which I imagine will only continue to expand in my work after completing my time at York University.

Themes

In 2014 Israeli authorities demolished 188 homes in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, rendering homeless 882 people, including 463 minors.

A hallmark of the fighting in Gaza this summer was the numerous strikes on residential buildings, destroying them while their occupants were still inside.

- B'Tselem - The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories

The Frame

Jacques Derrida in *The Truth in Painting* does a deconstructive reading of Kant's Third Critique or Critique of Judgment. In its first half, the work takes up the question of aesthetic judgment. Derrida picks up on the most parenthetical of points to flip the whole work inside out, overturning Kant's whole analytic of aesthetic judgment and emphasizing the *parergon*, the subordinate or accessory aspect of a work. Kant lists three parerga that are not central to the eragon, and as Derrida notes, point out an inherent lack in the object: the clothes on a human sculpture, the decorative pillars on a building and the frame of a work of art. The frame always points to something missing, and an ability to overturn what is being looked at. It is this disposition of observing the frame to overturn established meaning that I take up in my work.

Judith Butler, in *Frames of War*, in an approach derived from Derrida, notes that understanding how a frame functions towards its context “leads us to a way of understanding the frame's efficacy and its vulnerability to reversal, to subversion, even to critical instrumentalization.” (Butler 10) Knowing the frame can lead to critical re-use of the frame to reveal its limits. How can this happen? For Derrida it comes from a re-reading of the frame -- of understanding it as holding the key to what is missing. For Butler it comes from an examination of context in which content and

frames are produced. In referencing Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," every time a work of film or photography is reproduced, the context is remade and the frame becomes "a kind of perpetual breakage" (Butler 10). Every time a frame is made it is also broken.

Butler notes the complex meanings that exist in the English word to frame – not just a picture, but a criminal or innocent person as well. One is accused and judged in advance. Every frame, like every biased judgment, calls out for breaking. My multiple frames of interpretation on the theme of home, call out to break from one frame to the next. There is bias in the personal, bias in the familial and bias in the political. My work suggests using each frame to break out toward a wider reading of the next frame.

The issue of framing a picture comes into sharp relief when considering the early history of photography in pre-British Mandate Palestine. In the late 19th century photography was still a recent invention in Europe. One of the first foreign locations that early photographers rushed to was Palestine, with its allure of being a mythical place, existing beyond reality. The land of Bible stories "was more than a place, it was the earthly cradle of the Divine, somewhat similar to Mount Olympus" (Merli 28) where imagination could overwrite reality. Although photography provides an illusion of "true" indexical representation, there is always the immense context and previous knowledge that the viewer brings to examining each photograph. Early photography of Palestine was being used to reinforce a certain way of seeing and imagining a place rather than documenting the full extent of life in that place. The audience for these early photographs was comprised mainly of Christian Europeans who had an interest in seeing the Holy Land that, in their minds, had remained constant since the time of Christ. Including contemporary people living in the land in the biblical mise-en-scene would throw off the illusion and, consequently, would decrease sales, making such images less suitable for publication as biblical illustrations. As Merli points out, "Such

photographs primarily serve the purpose of showing what the Holy Land is assumed to be like, rather than of expanding knowledge of what is really unknown.”(25) The frame is used to limit questions and does not invite any questioning upon itself.

The technology of producing photographs was also still in its infancy and many of these early photographs were captured using daguerreotypes, a process that used metal plates and mercury vapor for development. Aside from making replicating the images difficult, the technique also required long exposure times. As a consequence, daguerreotypes often featured static environments, such as landscapes and architectural structures. When humans were included, it was often for the use of demonstrating scale. In photographs from before 1867, it is hard to find any human figures at all. (Nassar 319)

Thus, Palestinian people were not in the consciousness of the European and Western photographers. Edward L. Wilson, an American photographer, went so far as to say that the peasants he met near the Sea of Galilee were ‘repulsive’, and that “they are entirely out of harmony with the character of the Land” (Nassar 322), the character of the land being exclusively the setting of the ancient biblical stories he was trying to conjure. The technology and economic functions, mixed with a colonial mindset that was less interested in the “backwards and uncivilized masses,” led to a distorted view of the land. Sites like the Dome of the Rock, the shrine beside the Al Aqsa mosque, were seen through a dated and anachronistic biblical lens. The Dome of the Rock was at times labeled “Site of Solomon’s Temple.” The village of El-A’zariyeh was labeled as Bethany (Nassar 319). Photography rendered some of the liveliest sites seeming as barren and ancient ruin (Nassar 320). The focus away from people suited the biases of what audiences were hoping to see and allowed for, in the words of Beshara Doumani, the “amazing ability to discover the land without discovering the people.” Although assumedly not the main audience of the Christian photographers, this image of an empty land was seized upon by the early Zionists. A famous slogan at the time was

“a land without people, for a people without a land.”

I am struck by observing similar dynamics of uncritical ingestion of images in the diasporic Jewish community when it comes to present-day Israel. We enter as foreigners, already knowing what we want to see. For the European photographers, it was a biblical land in ruin. For Jews today, it is often a desire to see a beacon of hope and positivity in a post-Holocaust world. The desire to see “the first flowerings of our redemption” is so strong that any critique gets quickly swept away, or labeled as anti-Semitism and promptly dismissed. I repeatedly hear the separation barrier heralded as an admirably effective defense strategy, the Israeli army described as “the most moral army in the world” and the Jewish National Fund praised as a model of ecological inspiration. In my work, I am trying to encourage a re-examining of our frames of the world and ask what purposes they serve. Through text, audio and emphasis on the way a frame is viewed I hope to open up other ways of seeing the spaces film might present.

Return

My perspective of privilege on the topic of return is readily apparent. I have not been displaced myself and my personal search for home is more of a chosen kind of wandering. While my personal questions of identity have their roots in historic Jewish displacement, I personally have always had the ability to move and travel freely. The section of the film on visiting homes shows how as a Jewish North American I was able to easily immigrate to Israel and even make my home on occupied Palestinian land, under Israel’s Law of Return. Under the law of the state any person with a Jewish grandparent is eligible for citizenship and what the Israeli government labels “return”.

The imbalance is notable in Palestinian refugees’ inability to return to the land on which individuals and families have lived for generations. The 711, 000 refugees from the Nakba in the

1940s and their almost 5 million current descendants are recognized under United Nations resolution 194 as having the right to return, however, they are barred by Israel from doing so. The mechanism Israel uses to sustain a Jewish majority is two-pronged and simultaneously encourages Jewish immigration while excluding and obfuscating Palestinian connection to the land.

Re-Turn

I choose *Return* as the title of this work because it evokes a secondary realization that I see as connected to the question of the frame. The repetition, in not just turning but *re*-turning, implies the necessary sequence of seeing an image and subsequently returning to see the frame as well.

In Judaism the concept of *teshuvah* (return/repentance/answer) is connected with a return to an essential element of self that is discovered after, or through, a lapse. To observe one's own limits there must be a breaking through, similar to what was described by Butler and Derrida above, and a subsequent re-turn and readjustment. Each piece in this work questions the frame and invites the viewer's re-turning to the marginal or peripheral elements of the piece to arrive at a newly discovered essential element, which like Barthes's *punctum* might appear unexpectedly and peripherally.

Inspiration

I don't believe in formulas. I think each film should generate its own questions, its own answers, its own strategies, its own metaphors and its own inherent language or lexicon.

– Alan Berliner

Filmmakers

I have been most inspired by personal documentary filmmakers who work in a process-driven manner. As I have been searching to find my own voice and style, Alan Berliner was a useful

point of reference for including personal history into a film. Jay Rosenblatt's repurposing of black and white archival footage was a mode I played around with and influenced my 16mm section, with its archival feel. The diaristic, personal films of Jonas Mekas as well as the diary films of Israeli filmmaker David Perlov served as influences while I collected footage.

Jonas Mekas' is a central reference for diaristic filmmaking. I modeled some early attempts at daily collection of footage after his seminal collection of film-diaries, *Walden*. Mekas' orients his diaristic mode to questions of returning to home in *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*. The three parts of the film includes Mekas' first 16mm footage, shot not long after arriving in America, a trip back to Semeniskiai, Lithuania, the town in which he grew up and a third section revisiting Elmshorn, Germany, where he spent a year in a labor camp. Mekas travels back to the home he had to leave with the outbreak of World War II and revisits familiar places and faces (including his aging mother) in search of homes of the past and future. In his voice over, Mekas explains that he wants to make a film against war. He sets this intention over images of his neighborhood in Willimabusrg, claiming that there is war taking place elsewhere but in his city "nobody knew it". It is a poignant call to awareness beyond what is seen and an example of pointing out the limits of a frame. Mekas documents a number of gatherings of displaced persons that he attends outside of New York, noting that the whole world is full of displaced persons. The filmmaker's personal past experiences collect with force into a message that is forward-looking—to an awareness of violence and war and to the question of what becomes of those displaced by that continuing violence—through the many images that at first glance are almost quaint in their particular personal and intimate references.

Alan Berliner's films serve as a model of making a personal film that is easy to relate to, no matter what the viewer's background is. Whether through making reference to his own family or his own name, his is a mode where the personal details become immediately accessible. In films like *Intimate Stranger*, *Nobody's Business* and *Sweetest Sound* there is a recognizable style of voice over, a

mix of family video and found film footage and still images. Each film discovers its own style, whether through the metaphor of boxing while interviewing his father in *Nobody's Business* or the ego-surf of googling your own name in *Sweetest Sound*. Berliner's style of conducting interviews that are tightly framed on the face with no background emphasize the ability of a face to get across sufficient information to the viewer. These films are accessible and easy to relate to while still being specific in their personal details, aided in part perhaps by remaining completely apolitical.

The visual style of found footage over personal framing leads to a blending of the public and the personal. This technique is taken up more forcefully by Jay Rosenblatt. Just as the people in the found footage can be anyone and, indeed, are strangers even to the filmmaker, the audience is asked to similarly relate to the personal details more broadly. Something about the namelessness of the faces facilitates the question at the heart of watching personal filmmaking-- "What does this individual's experience have to say to my world?" The audio track serves as a counterpoint to the images, allowing the found footage to be reframed through the voice over track. The films of Rosenblatt and Berliner also engage specifically in Jewish identity through engaging with questions of family, immigration and trauma and provide examples of multiple ways to address those questions visually.

Harun Farocki often works with found footage as well, culling diverse footage from a wide range of archives, repurposing them and reframing what appears. His essay films directly engage questions of image-making and the frame. In *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*, Farocki observes a book of images of unveiled Muslim women from Algeria that had been taken by a French soldier. The filmmaker's hand covers and reframes the images, revealing and concealing the women's faces that were forcibly documented by an occupying, colonial military force. Farocki's meditations on the production and distribution of images mirror many of my own questions about the frame its power to conceal and reveal.

Phil Hoffman introduced me to hand-processing film and provided a model of process-based filmmaking where an idea for a film might coalesce over many years. The style of my interview with my grandmother came directly out of an assignment for Mike Hoolboom's process cinema class focusing on the face and approach to interview subjects.

The personalized assignment I received was to create an autobiography using images of strangers' faces from the subway. In class, we had already talked about Levinas' concept of the face, which I understood was more than the physical face itself, and rather a way to relate to an individual's slowly revealed self. Mike spoke about openness and letting an individual or an image unfold. The class and the assignment provided an experience in being present with what being framed. Every day, travelling to and from York, I would ask strangers on the TTC if I could film them. I recorded a number of faces and encounters, becoming more acutely aware of how much can be communicated with just being present with the face of another. With my grandmother, who I love and who am already close to, this experience of opening to her face was easier to access.

Progressive Jewish Thinkers

My primary historical exposure to understanding the Nakba came through reading Ilan Pappé's *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2007). Pappé forcefully argues that early Zionist leaders planned and carried out an ethnic cleansing, under the definition of the term that emerged in the former Yugoslavia—expulsion by force in order to homogenize the ethnically mixed population of a particular region or territory. (Pappé 2) An underlying ideology of population transfer to ensure Jewish population majority led to numerous massacres and human tragedy, and the instatement of a ideological system of violence that continues to function in Israel today.

In addition to her theorizing of the frame, Judith Butler also provides a trenchant reading of Jewish thinkers including Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin and Emmanuel Levinas in relation to issues of Zionism in *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (2012). Butler looks for the ways in which a universal ethic can and cannot align with a Jewish frame of ethics, and her work examines the role of the Jewish diaspora in providing a corrective, non-national response to the moral failures of Zionism.

Sections

Frame

One must be as wary of images as of words. Images and words are woven into discourses, networks of meanings. My path is to go in search of a buried meaning, to clear the debris that clog the images.

- Harun Farocki ²

This opening section of the sequence of short films examines the frame of early European photographers of Palestine in the late 19th century, as the technology of photography was being developed. I use early photography of Palestine to examine the political repercussions of capturing and presenting an image. This section points to the possibility that rather than representing historical truth, a photographer's (or filmmaker's) frame more accurately portrays the choices the photographer (or filmmaker) makes. The images presented in this section track historical representation of the land, starting from European landscape painting to the advent of early travel photography. The intentions and mechanics that allowed for a proliferation of images devoid of real

² Hanns Zischler, "Travailler avec Harun", *Trafic*, no. 43 (Autumn 2002), p. 27.

people (as discussed in detail in the “The Frame” section above) allow for erasure of people and narrative. This take on the early photography of Palestine is intended as an attempt to excavate the histories and stories of the oppressed through noticing what is missing. By examining the photographs, we can begin to decode part of the photographers’ aims by observing what falls within and without the borders of their pictures.

Taking a step back to noticing the frame, the most basic and assumed tool of the filmmaker, there is breathing and thinking room in which to question what goes into making and presenting a film. This section serves as an introduction and provides questions and instructions for viewing the pieces that follow. The questions of “What is left out of the frame?” and “What do we not see in the images before us?” are raised here as well as the themes of framing, bias, interest, and depiction of individuals in political context, which will all get picked up on in the following sections.

The audio track allows for another possibility for perspective on the images, pointing beyond the frame that appears on screen and serving as a reminder to myself that the theoretical issues are deeply connected to the lives of many people. I include the muezzin’s call from a visit to Jenin, which references my first exposure to noticing the invisibility of Palestinians in Zionist frameworks I grew up with. The other interwoven field recording is from a prayer rally at the Western Wall in Jerusalem for three Israeli teenagers who were kidnapped this past summer and were found murdered a few days after I made the recording. A circle of teenage yeshiva boys can be heard singing songs asking for divine mercy. It is possible to overhear a soldier calling out to me, I wrongly assume to ask me to stop recording. Instead she asks me to help her hop over a fence overlooking the men’s side of the Western Wall plaza. I see the piece is an invitation to “jump over” the assumptions of what we expect to see and to clear away the collected debris of past biases.

Home/Poem

They called their God Makom, "Place."

And now that they have returned to their place, the Lord has taken up
wandering to different places, and His name will no longer be Place,
but Places, Lord of Places.

- Yehuda Amichai, "Jewish Travel"³

The Hebrew word *bayit* means both house and home, and in poetry, also refers to a stanza. This second short piece in the sequence is a glimpse back at homes I lived in after immigrating to Palestine and Israel, using the exteriors of buildings I lived in and short personal reflections on my time there, on my relationship to specific locations and on the land in general. I intend for those experiences and reflections, including living in a settlement, protesting with Palestinians, visiting with my Grandmother's family from England, to reflect on larger political issues including colonial expansion in the West Bank and the role of diaspora Jewry in supporting and protesting right-wing trends in Israeli politics. The sites themselves include locations in the occupied West Bank -- Jenin, Bethlehem and Alon, a Jewish settlement, as well as West Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

The hand-processing of 16mm footage helped me remain intimately involved with the personal material. The reworking and handling of film, allowed for reflection over time while inspecting, re-watching and transferring the film. I shot on both film and video during my trip to Israel/Palestine and the time I spent with the film footage felt more direct, compared to video, and ultimately a more personal and precious encounter in working with the content of the film.

³ Amichai, Y., & Bloch, C. (2000). *Open Closed Open: Poems* (1st edition). New York: Harcourt.

The black and white images speak to nostalgia and work to evoke a sense of timelessness. The stationary buildings depicted in this section also evoke the images of buildings from the previous “Frame” section. While the evocation of “past” is in part affected, as I lived in these houses only a few years ago, the rough flickering and fading style of this section works with the fading memory of old homes that dim over time. Just as the internal memories are hard to bring out, the external images themselves are unstable as well.

The early photographers in Palestine went to sites they felt that they would be connected to, even though things had changed. I too returned to sites of familiarity. The memories from each home are reconstructed in my mind over time and the mental rebuilding is mirrored both in the emerging of the images from the fades and flickers of the film as well as in the physical construction happening at many of the sites I document. While the focus is on the physical structures, people and cars enter the largely empty frames. While the photographs of early Palestine portray a sense of stability/ruin, the medium of motion picture film inherently depicts movement and my work intentionally includes motion in and out of the frame.

Face

To expose myself to the vulnerability of the face is to put my ontological right to existence into question. In ethics, the other's right to exist has primacy over my own, a primacy epitomized in the ethical edict: you shall not kill, you shall not jeopardize the life of the other.

- Emmanuel Levinas ⁴

⁴ Cohen, R. A. (Ed.). (1986). *Face to face with Lévinas*. Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press. p 24.

This third section came out of a series of interviews I did with my grandmother. Her response recorded here came in answer to the question “How did you make it to Canada from Germany?” My grandmother goes over the details of her successful flight from Nazi-occupied Berlin, right before the outbreak of World War II. Her parents and extended family were unable to leave and did not survive. The trauma of surviving genocide weighs heavily on my family and community and this piece provides an opening to thinking about the outcomes of that history. It’s positioning amidst other work that deals more directly with the political situation in the current Jewish state is meant to comment on the usage of the Holocaust in service of political ends. While I draw no explicit connections I allow the juxtaposition to help direct the viewer’s own thoughts.

I have focused exclusively on my grandmother’s individual story because it is also the story of my family’s survival. The image of my grandmother’s face draws the viewer into the personal telling and ramification of the story. I also purposefully highlight my grandmother’s face and her voice as central for telling my own story, and recognize the role of my female ancestors in the creation of my own identity and formation of home in situations of displacement.

The focus on the face stands in contrast to the empty scenes in the other sections. The framing in this piece serves to cut out anything other than the humanity inherent in a face. In many ways I feel the visual of my grandmother’s face is testimony enough.

Wall Note

This section serves as recognition of my positioning as a Canadian Jew. I have easy access to Israel/Palestine and can travel freely, which is not the case for the approximately 2.5 million Palestinians living under military occupation in the West Bank, the 1.5 million Palestinians under siege in Gaza, and the approximately 4 million refugees in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. The scene cuts between the Western Wall in Jerusalem and the separation barrier 7 km away, outside of

Bethlehem. I see my ability to access and travel bringing along with it a responsibility to document and comment on the restrictions I observe.

The performance of passing film stock through the walls evokes the common practice of placing notes in the Western Wall with prayers. Every trip I take to Israel/Palestine my grandmother asks me to place a note in the wall for her and I see this piece as a kind of prayer to see beyond the walls that can cover the oppression of others, in this case specifically those living on the other side of the separation barrier.

A wall provides another metaphor for understanding the frame, emphasizing what is not seen, or what might lie hidden outside the boundary of vision. In the voice over I recite a prayer trying to bring light to the difficulties faced by people who I know are not seen. I begin with referring back to my grandmother whose eyesight has greatly deteriorated since filming with her last year. I refer to Mutasim Ali, an organizer of African refugees from Darfur who I connected with while I visited. Mutasim had previously spoken to Jewish audiences about a shared legacy of genocide and at the time of my visit he was in the Holot prison in the Negev desert with other unrecognized refugees. My friend Bahaa, whose family I often visited in Jenin in Area A, an urban area of the West Bank that is supposed to be under full Palestinian Authority control, has recently been detained by the Israeli military for at least six months. The Sub Laban family in Jerusalem is, at the time of writing this paper, under imminent threat of being evicted from the house that has been their family home for generations in the Old City. Eitan Bornstein Alepo, the founder of Zochrot, an organization that commemorates the Nakba in Israel, has, for years, puts up signs around the country on the sites of destroyed Palestinian villages and towns. They are often removed and defaced. The iNakba app that Zochrot created helped me locate the destroyed villages in Canada Park, further described in the final section below. All of these individual stories exist outside of

larger media frames and through this piece I allude to the myriad of stories that are often hidden by walls or exist outside of our frames of vision.

The film stock in this section was shot base-out, or backwards, resulting in a yellowish tinge. This was the first 16mm colour footage that I shot and the chance “mistake” materially brings out the possibility of seeing from the “other side”. It also offers an experience of looking differently, in this case through the base of the film. As Phil Hoffman pointed out to me, seeing the film another way, like this, may be hard to get used to, but the experience of becoming familiar with seeing differently offers possibilities of its own. This experiment, or mistake, can stand as an emblem of transforming something that may seem “other” into one’s expanded vision—of taking what is discovered beyond the wall or frame into one’s own world.

A Tree Has Been Planted in Your Name

The names cling to him, like the falling pine needles that slip into his pocket. How odd! The tired memory tries to refresh itself with these faceless names.

- “Facing the Forests”, A. B. Yehoshua ⁵

The final section of the sequence focuses on the current location of the Jewish National Fund’s Canada Park. The idyllic setting is a wooded forest, with a series of nature walks just off the road between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Signs in the park point out ancient Roman and Jewish history

⁵ Yehoshua, A. B. (1970). *Three Days and a Child*. Doubleday.

on the land. What goes unmarked are the villages of Yalu, Beit Nuba and Imwas, which were destroyed in 1967 as well as Dayr Ayyub, which was destroyed in 1948. Their ruins all lie underneath the park's grounds.

Canada Park was created through donations of Canadian Jews and monuments outside the park include thank you plaques for the donations from hundreds of individuals and organizations that supported the project, including my elementary school, community organizations and community members whom I know.

This section of the film raises the question of how to revive memories that have been erased. I present the information about the park that I have found in order to ask how to further question the systems of authority that try to suppress memory and keep Palestinian history out of the public eye.

Eitan Bornstein Alepo, the founder of Zochrot mentioned in the "Wall Note" section, informed me of the park and its history. It is one of the first places where his organization put up a sign documenting destroyed Palestinian villages. In an interview with me, Eitan mentioned the likelihood that the stones of the monuments were likely taken from the destroyed village buildings, citing anecdotally a prevalent Israeli practice at the time of using material that was nearby. The repurposing of the same site and even potentially the same stones for a park furthering an exclusively Jewish narrative, points to how completely the past can be hidden and repurposed.

Conclusion

The frame is the basic building block of filmmaking. My role as a filmmaker is to decide what is shown and what is cut out of the frame. I decide when to dwell in one frame and when to move on to another. The frame is a way of understanding how one sees the world, and in a reality where understandings are always expanding and never exhaustive, the frame is also a call to continually interrogate one's understanding of the world.

Each short film in this work attempts in its own way to draw attention back to the frame. The photography of European photographers provides a paradigm for cutting out personal or national narratives through selective framing. The section on home provides a counterpoint to bringing individual stories to structures and acknowledges the personal choices of framing. My grandmother's story reveals part of my personal frame of familial and ethnic context—what I chose to frame is motivated by my background and stories I grew up with. The wall provides another counterpoint to the frame, another way of cutting things from view and a way of envisioning beyond what is not seen. The final section takes a critical and political stance on how a Palestinian narrative is persistently cut out of the frame. By reframing the JNF's Canada Park I attempt to begin to reintroduce a frame that is not readily viewable.

Although I have previously worked in a process-driven fashion—working with a theme, collecting images and re-orienting them over time—this has been the longest and largest sustained effort of this sort for me. Trusting in my intuition, patience, and endurance have led me to new places and it has been a learning process seeing, watching and nurturing the work over time. I feel especially grateful for the supportive environment of the MFA program at York for providing space for me to explore and an openness to a winding journey to completion. I am especially thankful for Brenda Longfellow's focused attention and patience. In addition to navigating working on a film about home as I transitioned my own life back to Toronto, the project also took place while

mourning my father's sudden passing in the fall of 2014, and on numerous occasions I left the project aside only to slowly return to it.

The thesis work has been focused around the spatial question of home, displacement and diaspora has aroused a curiosity for me around conceiving and portraying space on film. Broader questions of interactions with space and place have coalesced in an interest in architecture, which I will likely be pursuing more concretely in an architecture program this fall. I plan for my work in film to continue to find new expression and sources of inspiration alongside this interest in structural design and I continue to think about the relation between materiality of film, form and architecture, peaked in part by the thesis work of my classmate, Eva Kolzce.

Although, as I have expressed throughout this support paper, I hope the personal details in this work will have broad applicability and will encourage all viewers to think more deeply about the frames through which we view film and life, I am particularly interested in addressing the Jewish community in particular and those interested in the history and future of Palestine/Israel more generally. I hope this film will serve as a new frame for discussions of Israel and Palestine in the Jewish community and provide another lens amongst the legion of films that address life there. I hope it will raise questions no matter what backgrounds viewers come from and will encourage a critical eye towards the frames through which we are accustomed to see.

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Appendices

Appendix A. – Various Proposals

Thesis Proposal – Mar 11, 2013

Working Title: Toronto Above

Production Medium: Film/Video

Genre: Experimental Personal Documentary

The elevated stature I ascribe to place has kept me bouncing from one city to the next, always searching out the next plateau and looking upward. My thesis film will grapple with the privileged and at times religious significance given to space and place by examining conceptions of home and diaspora. The film will be centered on my personal reflections around my own journey of leave-taking and subsequently making Toronto my home again. My reflections will intersect with stories and questions that touch on similar themes in the lives of people who I encounter in the city.

In researching and preparing for this film I will be immersing myself in the works of other filmmakers who work in a similar personal mode, to situate my work in the spectrum of personal filmmaking, which Catherine Russell describes as the “autoethnographic tradition”. Russell notes that “memory and travel are means of exploring fragmented selves and placing ethnicity at one remove, as something to remember, to see, but not quite experience.” (279). Through geographical travel to my previous homes in Israel and New York as well as travelling temporally through past stages of personal development, I will try to stitch together some of my fragmented selves, in an effort to connect my personal history with larger political and historical narratives.

The trajectory of the film will follow my observations about my parents’ past in Toronto, reaching back to my grandparents forced immigration, which eventually landed them in Canada at the time of the Second World War. I will touch on my religious education in the suburbs that led me to study at the Jewish Theological seminary in New York and the Zionist underpinnings of my education that kept taking me on trips to Israel until I thought I had permanently relocated there. While sifting through personal factors that led to my decisions to move, I will uncover social and communal pressures that facilitated each move in exploring the role the Jewish community played in allowing me to sometimes live in an “imagined community” before I arrived in Israel and how my ingrained Canadian characteristics prevented my full identification as an Israeli.

The film will mix layers of past and present, as well as mediums of film and video to underscore the multifaceted aspects that allow for a complex conception of home. Narrative strands will be taken up and shifted associatively, compressing time and forgoing linear narrative to capture the complexities and allusiveness of memories that shape identity. Keeping true to a process-based approach, I will not be planning much of the content of the film in advance, however because I will be dealing with Jewish conceptions of a homeland in Israel I will also present a Palestinian narrative which voices strong connections to a homeland in Palestine as expressed through a diasporic community of Palestinians living in Toronto, interrogating assumptions about both Jewish and Palestinian narratives as I go.

My film will contain traditional documentary interviews, stock and personal archive footage, as well as elements of montage and other structural experimentation. Visual and symbolic elements with connotations of loss and exile will be introduced over the course of the film including prayers and rituals surrounding the return to Zion in the Jewish tradition (daily liturgy, mourning elements, fast days, other customs) and symbols used in Palestinian society to remember al-Nakba, the Catastrophe (keys from old homes, Handala cartoons, protest movements, visual art) In addition to finding my place on the spectrum of personal filmmaking I will also be in conversation about how my work that touches on Palestine and Israel fits into those national cinematographic legacies.

My work will be essayistic and meditative in style, centered around my own subjective voice as a filmmaker. Like the verite diary work of Jonas Mekas, I plan to have consistent interplay between the filmed images connoting the past and reinterpretation and continuity with the present through editing (while not necessarily being so reliant on voiceover.) While my final film, will not be as anthological as George Kuchar's diaries, I hope to move in the same direction of fully embracing my experiences, making attempts cover everything no matter how mundane. The visual style and associative alchemy of Phil Hoffman's work has been influential to me, experiencing hand processing film and being introduced to personal process filmmaking while a student of his, and will serve as a strong influence as well.

Because my film will follow along the contours of my own life, I will let it develop naturally with events as they occur and people who are close at hand. My filmmaking process will be centered around accepting and examining rather than forcing a preconceived image or idea to the fore. The thematic elements that I have chosen to focus on are questions that are central to me and are already integrated into the fabric of my life, living with Israeli roommates, conversing with Palestinians engaging and questioning Jewish communal norms on a regular basis.

I plan to use the frame of this thesis project to bring the audience inside considerations that are already at play for me day to day. I plan to shoot often if not continuously which will lend a diaristic feel to some of the work. Because I believe that the personal is always relatable I am confident that this exploration of self will ultimately be a more universal rather than personal statement, my experiences serving as a model or microcosm for larger cultural forces at play.

Grad Symposium Script

My project's working title is **Teshuvah** – Return

It's an experimental documentary exploring themes of home and diaspora,

Exploring displacement historically and personally and presently. Stability and **exile**, distance and nearness.

I'm interested in exploring the paths that take us farther from or closer to home. cycles of exile and return both in a framing of physical location but also, in a deeper way psychologically

The Personal

My original intent was to explore personal, person filmmaking. I conceive of the personal aspect being less my story, and more a recognition of my own subjective interest and history, and my own gaze at my story's that are close to me.

one important reason I'm drawn to personal filmmaking is (not to retell my story, but rather) working with material that I feel close to and have the confidence and authority to edit to the needs of the film.

Process

It is mainly the process that is being driven by my personal interests and intuitions.

I will be collecting images to arrange around themes.

I want to personal to be more a recognition of the subjective, both in thinking of the camera's gaze as my own and in exploring subjects that are the most pressing and relevant for me as someone ill-at ease in many places.

In just this example I've found the layers of meaning of working through video I've collected rewarding, with layered in meaning

Structure

I will be using The structural element I hope will tie the disparate elements together will be the kabalistic *sefirot* – emanations or chakras, that in the kabalistic imagination tell the narrative of the divine and its union and return to itself.

The sefirot framework, Colonization, personal ethnography

Projection

Brecht's alienation effect--

Not be immersed in the experience but be able to step out to notice one's own reactions.

I'm interested in the role of physical space as it relates to conceptions of home.

In the example here there is the (mainly) landscape of Europe, in itself devoid of context

Only later, under the influence of the neoplatonists, did the kabblalists come to describe the *sefirot* as emerging in a sequence. And it is a sequence ultimately that does not necessarily have to do with time, but rather has an intrinsic logic and a system of responses.

My grandmother gives a narrative.

I'm interested in techniques that will make us take a step back. The ways I'm thinking of doing this at the moment are projection, juxtaposition of images, and moving away from linear story telling.

The strands that will tie the piece together:

There is a narrative in my head that floats in the background of this

That my grandparents were displaced, my parents settled here in a Jewish community that turns our homeward sentiment to Israel, A place where Jewish dispossession in Europe gave rise to Jews dispossessing in Palestine.

My choice to connect it to the *sefirot* recognizes something more cyclical about this pattern.

The *sefirot* flow into each other and are envisioned, especially in early kabbalistic texts, as a circle.

I don't think narratives of finding home are so straightforward and that ultimately exile and return are journeys that happen most importantly in the self. And I want to find a way to get at that.

It's a journey that keeps happening. With many overlapping layers.

Relevance and activist art

Dealing with the theme of exile is bound up with trauma. I believe in video as a way to bring up memories. I hope that my working through the issues will not only be beneficial to me but to the larger communities to which I belong.

Living in Israel Palestine. I still see a role for activist filmmaking.

I feel pretty removed from it in Toronto, which is part of the estrangement I wish to explore in the piece. I was planning on traveling there, which I still might do and I'm also interested in its implications and repercussions.

The protest shots I chose to include here I took a couple of years ago the week after Mustafa Tamimi, an unarmed protestor was shot and killed by a teargas canister fired by an Israel soldier. Just yesterday the Israeli army announced that it wasn't going to be filing charges against the soldier or anyone involved.

Influences

I've been moved by watching personal and process based pieces from a number of filmmakers including Phil, Alan Berliner...

I'm journaling every so often.

I'm trying to work and see what comes out of it.

I hope to kick into gear a bit more starting this break. To travel to Israel and Palestine and make the connection between that screen and my families story more explicit.

An image that I'm thinking of is Jacobs ladder, in Jacobs first exile from his homeland (which happens to be through present day Palestine, deep in the West Bank) he dreams of angels going up and down a ladder. I think of the images of travelling away and then returning. Some I draw close and some draw away from me. Images becoming distant and return. And from the perplexing dream Jacob awakes and says, "the Divine was here and I didn't know it. How awesome is this place." Which is the song that we heard here sung the other day at my housewarming party.

Framing for Thesis – October 2014

In the pre-state era photographers were brought into Palestine to photograph the land. (I'm going to do more research into the history of Palestinian photography) What they chose to capture in the frame allowed their Jewish audience to see the Holy Land that they had dreamed of —rolling hills and desert – a barren wasteland waiting to be resettled or as the common Zionist slogan framed it: "a land without a people, for a people without a land". What those early photographers left out of their images was the lives of Palestinian people who had been living on the land for generations. Framing for comfort cannot ignore the aspects that remain unseen, and what is left out still retains an essential presence.

Home is the place where we settle and feel most comfortable. It is a structure that creates a sense of interiority by leaving out the surroundings. (The four sides of an image. The four walls of a room.) When we choose one do we leave behind the others? What my film will explore is what is framed and what falls out of the frame as we step in and out of homes—and in and out of new perspectives of home. Following a personal trajectory I will follow my grandmothers' voices that set in motion the decisions that made Canada and Toronto my framing home city. And I will explore the narratives of a Jewish state that makes claims on me, as my people's home. The question of Israel also brings into sharper focus the power of perspective, where one land and one place can be framed in opposing ways and how the question of Israel intersects with an understanding of Palestine.

Chapters and individual incidents will serve as essays in trying to frame a home, while my role as the filmmaker will push the boundaries outward and interrogate what is left out of the picture. From a forest in Israel that stands on destroyed Palestinian villages, to conflicting personal stories that lead me to read home in Canada as well as in Israel, to structures that tell stories and mute buildings waiting to be filled again, through the story of Israeli and Palestinian youth coming together in Canada, how so much cannot be framed and how memory itself serves as an incomplete framing device.

It will be marked with stories of what happens when the lens turns and what stands behind it. What comes to the foreground and what fades away. Memory as a framing device. The rooms we walk in and out of. The home we make within our own hearts. The frame that is the present moment.

Appendix B. – Selected Journals

At various points through the process of putting together this thesis film I took notes on the experience. The following are some excerpts and blog posts:

Sept 9, 2013

Haven't done anything. Have these recurring ideas about filming a little each day. Then combining it into 10 minute projects each week. Just lining up footage. To be able to look at different layers over time. To capture the present, as it is, and then revisit it. To have a way of looking at the past, while moving forward. I want to call the project return. Re-turn. Inward. Still in the *teshuvah* mode. During the (high) holiday season it feels significant. Starting. What will I do in the space of (the Hebrew month of) Hesvhan? Need to go to Israel. Need to just be doing. Scared of editing. Sit. Do meditation through watching films. Reading. Being serious. And having fun with it. Be grateful for the opportunity I have. Use what is at my disposal.

Sept 11

Didn't film anything again. Read some Lefebvre on landscape and cinema the other day. Thought about framing. How we do it intuitively when we look out on an undifferentiated landscape. Filming changes the moment. Unless the camera is in hiding. How will I film/frame my movie? So much editing to do. Worried about my computer. Worried about flying. Worried about so much for this project. It's paralyzing. Need to just get going. Live. Film. Edit. Love. Fun. Mend.

Sept 21

My dad died yesterday. When to film? I'm not filming any of this so far.

Nov 22

Watched *What These Ashes Wanted*. Spoke to Bubbie. Told her I'm going to film her. She only remembers who I am half the time. Everything is meaningful, if you can remember it. There are so many ways to come at things slowly. I can't wait though. I also have to move carefully. To extract the moments and the causes. My present is tied to my familial past. And each moment is new. The context is only important if it frees me up to experience the moment fully. I need to read more Buber.

Jan 27, 2014

the longer
I look
at your face
the more beautiful you are
and the more interested
I am in looking.

your face
is an olive branch,
a gnarled peace offering

that I take with me from the sea
to the boat where I rest briefly.

your face is
a tarnished mirror--
dazzling, useless.

the longer
I look
at your face
the more you change,
and the more I turn
into --

June 23

Sugar and tea. Familiar scents in Ramallah as I loaded onto a Jenin-bound *service*. Everyone was as friendly as I remembered—it was like returning home. I forgot how breathtaking the ride up is. Goats out for pasture in the valleys, the sun going down behind the quarries mining “Jerusalem stone”. I missed my friend’s puppet show, but I quickly settled into Cinema Jenin’s guesthouse. I spoke with N, from Denmark, who was working with university students across the West Bank, helping them to develop marketable job skills. He told me a couple of days before he started in Jenin, the Arab American University where he was working, and that I visited many years ago, had been ransacked by the Israeli army and a few students were arrested. His co-worker was afraid to continue with him (citing insurance concerns) and is holed up in Ramallah. The three Israeli yeshiva students that were kidnapped have still not been found and the Israeli army operation is still at large in area A, doing all sorts of things that are admittedly not connected to the kidnappings. N was ultimately horrified by the every-day stuff that happens in Hebron, more than whatever particular violence was blowing this week.

I got kunafeh, glanced at the World Cup game everyone in town was shouting about, and slept in my old bed. I made plans to do an interview and see some old friends in the morning, but I got an email about meeting my campers in the Galilee and tried running out across the other side of the green line. The poem above is about why I was three hours late and missed it.

I had never crossed at the Jalameh checkpoint before. I always go through Qalandia. It was a short taxi ride from Jenin, but no one was getting in that morning. I spoke to a few people in line (in Hebrew) about what people in North America think about the situation (after they noticed me filming the line) and specifically how Jews are relating to it. “Life is difficult here” was the chorus. But they weren’t talking about the unaccounted for wait in the heat, perhaps to get to their place of birth a few hundred meters away-- they were mainly talking about stifled economic opportunity. About being paid 80 shekels (~\$20) for a day’s work in construction. “That’s probably how much you get paid for an hour in Canada,” they rightly assumed.

My 16mm camera has a lot of metal pieces and does kind-of look like a strange weapon. So, the 4 Palestinian men who were being friendly toward me, got put in a holding cell without their stuff to be questioned too. I was alone and they kept moving me back and forth between rooms. All of the people working at the checkpoint were private-- hired security. Not army. And after looking at my camera long enough and waylaying me sufficiently, they let me go.

The final guy I got passed onto looked at my passport again, asked if I spoke Hebrew (in Hebrew) and then if I was Jewish. I told him 'yes' and he shook his head toward his partner in the booth in what seemed like a mix of disapproval and disgust. Maybe he didn't approve of naïve diaspora Jews spending time with "the enemy". Maybe he was concerned at the risk of me being kidnapped. It's the same as every time I come-- the danger I feel comes entirely from the Israelis.

When I got into the taxi to Umm Al-fahm the wind was coming in so fast from the open window, I couldn't breathe.

Tomorrow I visit Alon.

June 30

Enough fence and concrete to contain masses, but only echoing halls in Bethlehem, at the Gilo 300 checkpoint. The opposite of my previous posts' hour-long checkpoint annoyance-- there was not another soul in line here. It was comfortable, pleasant even. Down to the cool water from the fountain after I finished filming along the graffitied separation barrier. They even let my very same "suspicious" camera go without a question. The woman at the end waved me through, hardly looking up to glance at my passport.

Shabbat in Jerusalem—more quiet and a Torah portion about listening and speaking to silent rocks. (Numbers 20:2-13)

I return to Tel Aviv to speak with Eitan Bronstein Aparicio, the founder of Zochrot. He tells me about Canada Park, planted over the Palestinian villages of Imwas, Yalu and Bayt Nuba which were destroyed in 1967. The Park is over the Green Line, which most people don't know.

<http://zochrot.org/en/content/75-visitors-canada-park-believe-it%E2%80%99s-located-inside-green-line>

I go to visit and find more silence. I don't come across people as I walk around. The Imwas cemetery is quiet. Do people wonder about the villages? Where did all the stones go? The trees provide so much shade. And then there are the rows of names of Canadians who financed the planting, their names chiseled into old hewn stones. Where did the stones come from? (Eitan suggests they are from the destroyed towns.) I recognize many names among the rows of those honoured-- "orchard planters" and "grover keepers"—my school, shuls I've attended, public figures, The Metropolitan Toronto Police Department and others.

Still today the JNF continues aiding in displacing people over the Green Line and planting forests over people's destroyed homes.

<http://972mag.com/despise-denials-jnf-to-continue-eviction-effort-of-jerusalem-palestinians/28489/>

<http://www.truah.org/issuescampaigns/bedouin/jnf-and-bedouin/responses-to-jnf.html>

And still there is so much silence.



Trees in Canada Park Israel

FOUR TREES HAVE BEEN PLANTED IN ISRAEL

IN TRIBUTE TO

MY NEPHEW

MARTIN ALEXANDER ROTENBERG

MOSHE ARYE

MAY YOU GROW LIKE A BEAUTIFUL TREE

LOVINGLY

AUNT DEBBIE



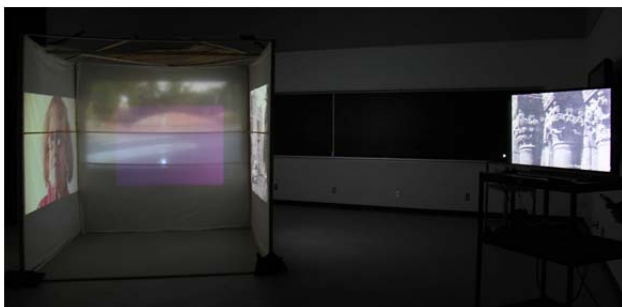
Jewish National Fund of Canada
קרן קיימת לישראל

A certificate my brother received on his Bar Mitzvah. I recall receiving a number of trees, but I didn't hold onto the certificates.

Appendix C. – On Installation

For my thesis defense I projected sections onto multiple walls of a *Sukkah* or tabernacle, a ritual religious structure built on the eponymous Feast of the Tabernacle that represents the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (and the accompanying exile in 70 CE) and also serves as a reminder of the Israel's biblical wandering in the desert. It touches on both early mythical and historical occurrences that contributed to the notion of diasporic wandering as a central aspect of Jewish identity until today. Projecting images of contemporary displacement from Europe and the displacement of Palestinians from modern-day Israel relay a layered meaning of the continuing outgrowths of this identity. Encountering these layered meaning and images in a viewing context that allows for a free movement through the space highlights both the viewer's distance from forced movement inherent in displacement and a feeling of interruption.

On May 26, 2015 I built a *sukkah* structure from wood and cotton fabric in CFT Room 104. I set up 3 digital projectors, a separate “framed” monitor with more discrete edges for the Frame section and a 16mm film looper with a film print I had optically printed from my original footage for the Wall Note section. On May 27, the day of the defense, I took the committee and audience around the space, first watching each section individually and then letting the sections play concurrently, allowing for the images and sound to interact and overlap, while those present continued to circulate and revisit—or return to—the work.



A view of the installation setup

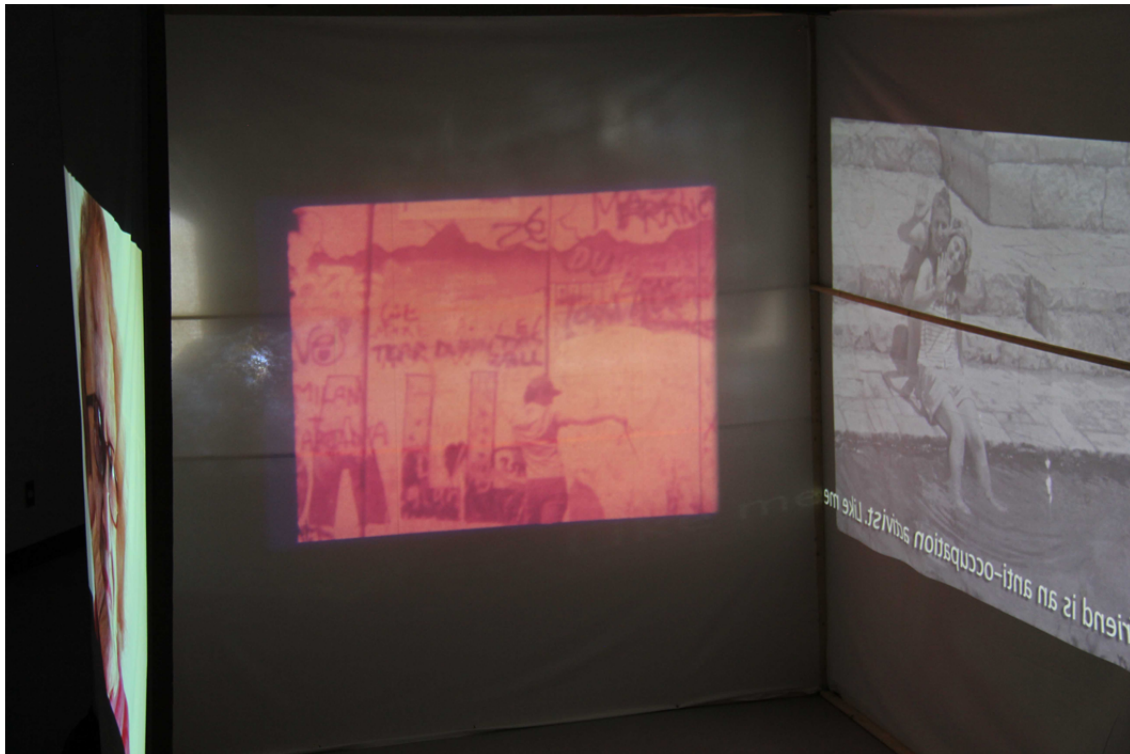
While my reflections in the support paper refer to a conventional linear film, I had been considering an installation to bring out specific aspects of the film. My thesis work explores questions of perceived space and conceptions of “home” in a non-narrative mode. Themes of displacement and alienation, in following my grandmother’s displacement from Berlin during the Holocaust are foregrounded. I aimed to display both personal concerns and national questions around how one settles into a space over generations. I believe such content benefited from an alienated viewing experience that creates a sense of movement and displacement during viewing. This kind of movement during exhibition created multiple modes of focus to encourage a sense of “wandering” through the space. Such a motif allowed for spatial planning of the exhibition to serve as a unifying strand through diverse footage that I had collected across countries and motion-picture media. The non-linearity of the project is specifically served by a non-linear gallery experience that is characterized more by flow than specific intention.

The option of projecting onto a non-screen structure allowed for sculpture and architectural concerns in the service of raising more theoretical questions of space, including “How does home feel?” and “What is the space that provides rest and comfort?” While the unexplained sukkah structure was confusing for some viewers, I think the overall effect of the installation to join together the sections and bring attention to the viewing experience, the intersection of film and space and the limits of a frame within a wider spatial milieu was successful.

The simple and temporary physical structure of the *sukkah* is an object that has enmeshed personal memories for me, as my father passed away on the festival of *Sukkot*. The object of the *sukkah* and the time period associated with the holiday bring up issues of my family connection and ties to Canada – I am keenly aware of living in the Annex, in neighborhoods where my father grew up and lived his life and also the loss of part of that familial connection to space. The dual nature of connection and alienation can come through with a looped presentation and a possibility of multiple

circuits throughout the viewing space. A looped film with a cycled viewing suggests a process of interpretation and growth even in viewing, and again in the connection of the spatial and temporal.

A thematic lens of my project is that of what is left out of the frame which includes—my grandmother’s trauma, the Palestinian narrative in my Jewish community, the political behind the personal and the personal lying with the political. The off-screen space serves a metaphor through which the “unframed” can be brought into focus. By engendering awareness of space in the cinema, I hope to model the motions of bringing awareness to what is unsaid in a narrative—turning toward the marginalized and troubling aspects of our own perspectives.



Detail of the sukkah installation

Appendix C. – Filmography

- *David Holzman's Diary*. Dir. Jim McBride. 1967.
- *David Perlov's Diaries*. Dir. David Perlov. 1973 – 1983.
- *Fresh Blood, A Consideration of Belonging*. Dir. bh Yael. 1996.
- *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*. Dir. Harun Farocki. 1988.
- *Intimate Stranger*. Dir. Alan Berliner. 1991.
- *Lacan Palestine*. Dir. Mike Hoolboom. 2012.
- *Nobody's Business*. Dir. Alan Berliner. 1996.
- *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*. Jonas Mekas. 1972.
- *Sans Soleil*. Dir. Chris Marker. 1982.
- *Sherman's March*. Dir. Ross McElwee. 1985.
- *Sink or Swim*. Dir. Su Friedrich. 1990.
- *Sweetest Sound*. Dir. Alan Berliner. 2001.
- *The Great Book Robbery*. Dir. Benny Brunner. 2012.
- *The Smell of Burning Ants*. Dir. Jay Rosenblatt. 1994.
- *We Began By Measuring Distance*. Dir. Basma Alsharif. 2009.
- *What These Ashes Wanted*. Dir. Phil Hoffman. 2001.